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Ranking Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs
Summit of the Americas: A New Beginning for U.S. Policy in the Region
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Democratic institutions in the Hemisphere are under increasing assault from internal and external actors.

We must help fight this trend, not by engaging with leaders who are demonstrably anti-American and anti-democratic in the hope they will miraculously change their ways, but instead, standing firmly with our democratic allies and defending freedom as a central tenet of our policy in the Western Hemisphere. I just met with the UN Secretary General and discussed the absurdity of having a gross human rights violator, like the Cuban Regime, on the UN Human Rights Council.

Nicaragua's November municipal elections were widely recognized as a fraudulent manipulation of the people's right to fairly elect their leaders.

Ortega has:

- stripped the opposition of any political space,
- developed neighborhood councils to spy on the political rights of fellow Nicaraguans, and
- consolidated control over all four branches of the Nicaraguan government.

In Venezuela, there have been attacks on property rights and the freedom of press, to decree rule and explicit threats against opponents. Chavez is gradually stripping the people of their fundamental rights.

His ongoing anti-Semitic incitement is of particular concern.

Since Venezuela was listed by our State Department as a state sponsor of anti-Semitism in 2008, Chavez has only worked to further stoke the fires of anti-Semitism.

With the support of countries like Venezuela, Nicaragua, Cuba, Bolivia and Ecuador, a re-alignment is taking place with rogue regimes, such as Iran.

Iran is working to expand its influence within the region.

The Argentine government concluded that the 1994 attack on the AMIA Jewish Community Center was "decided and organized by the highest leaders of the former government of . . . Iran, whom...entrusted its execution to... Hezbollah".

The AMIA case demonstrates that the Iranian regime has used its embassies abroad to extend its radical goals.

Defense Secretary Gates recently said:

“I’m concerned about the level of...subversive activity that the Iranians are carrying on in a number of places in Latin America...They’re opening a lot of offices and a lot of fronts, behind which they interfere in what is going on in some of these countries.”

Bolivia and Ecuador are two recent hosts of Iranian embassies and resumed their baseless accusations against the U.S.

Blaming dissent on the “interference” of the U.S., Bolivia’s Evo Morales has:

- expelled our U.S. Ambassador and another American diplomat,
- kicked out our entire DEA presence,
- removed some USAID personnel and programs, and
- forced our Peace Corps volunteers to pull out.

In Ecuador, last September’s constitutional reform not only allowed for Correa to potentially extend his presidency to the year 2017, but also forced the closure of the U.S. Manta base – a crucial post for drug interdiction flights.

Correa ordered the expulsion of two U.S. Embassy officials.

We are also seeing these authoritarian leaders establishing alliances with Iran, Russia and China.

Fortunately, the U.S. does have strong partners in the fight against narcotraffickers, extremists and organized crime.

There is no denying Colombia’s commitment on these issues.

It has made incredible progress against narco-traffickers and the FARC. At the same time, it has worked to strengthened civil society and democratic institutions.

Colombia should be recognized for this, including with the adoption of the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement.

This agreement will strengthen our bilateral ties, while benefiting workers and consumers in both our nations.

Mexico’s drug cartel problems are an imminent threat to our homeland security. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, referred to the recent spike in violence as a crisis.

Our Justice Department reported that more that 700 people were recently arrested as part of a crackdown on Mexican drug and smuggling cartels operating inside the U.S.

Another country in critical need of support is Haiti.

A myriad of challenges have placed Haiti at an extreme disadvantage in finally securing peace, prosperity and stability for its people.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to safeguard and advance critical U.S. interests in the region.

